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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR INL/LP, WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KCRM](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [TD](#)

SUBJECT: NEW COMMISSIONER OF POLICE'S FIRST THREE MONTHS IN OFFICE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Although 2008 murders in Trinidad & Tobago will easily surpass last year's record of almost 400, newly appointed Acting Commissioner of Police James Philbert has brought some cautious optimism to the struggle to instill a sense of societal security. Early in his tenure, this cautious optimism uptick is related more to Philbert's rhetoric, style and organizational efforts than any noticeable statistical change. Whether this perceived shift is a chimera or represents the beginning of the end of the years-long crime surge is unclear, and others in the GOTT (especially National Security Minister Joseph) will play a strong role in how this all plays out. The "smart" money remains on Philbert not being able to change the culture of the police or make a lasting dent in crime, but that there is at least a debate over if this is possible highlights that some hope still exists. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Since taking office July 5, following Parliament's rejection of Stephen Williams for police chief, Acting Commissioner James Philbert has enjoyed more positive press than someone in his position might expect. This stems from his "can-do" style, willingness to be seen on the ground at crime scenes, openness to publicly berating and exhorting his officers to take action, and positive comparisons with his lackluster predecessor. The press and public also seem to agree that since Philbert became commissioner, police are more visible on the streets. He has done this by limiting vacations and ordering plain clothes officers to wear uniforms. Media-savvy, Philbert also has touted other results, such as a quarter-over-quarter deceleration in the rate of murders and an increase in seized firearms and ammunition.

¶3. (SBU) In addition, Philbert held an early September retreat with senior level officers to underline his "greater presence" discipline and consider course changes in attacking crime. Besides a focus on greater visibility, Philbert also is cognizant of the need for more formal and informal community interaction. During last week's mass gathering of ruling party faithful to show support for Prime Minister Manning during a Parliamentary no-confidence debate, RSO spotted Philbert in uniform personally taking part in the crowd control effort.

¶4. (SBU) Philbert, who hopes to remain in place for several years as Parliament reconsiders how to choose a police chief (there is widespread dissatisfaction in the current quasi-independent procedure) has cooperated with USG law enforcement agencies in the past and attended training at the FBI academy. A lawyer by education, he has spent most of his career as a Detective in the Criminal Intelligence Unit and other special units in the TTPS, including head of the Homicide Bureau.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Philbert has a long way to go in raising crime detection rates, stopping the murder spiral, fully professionalizing the police services and bringing a sense of security to T&T. His initial actions appear to be in the right direction, and he seems to be working well with other key anti-crime players like National Security Minister Joseph, but it will be "wait and see" to determine

if his policies -- and those of the GOTT -- reap any lasting rewards. The "smart money" doubts lasting progress, but Philbert's first days in office suggest that other outcomes cannot be completely discounted.

AUSTIN